

Notes on academic labour and co-operative struggles for subjectivity

Professor Richard Hall, De Montfort University.

rhall1@dmu.ac.uk @hallymk1

Abstract

The academic has no apparent autonomy beyond the temporary amelioration of her labour relations with those who direct the University for the logic of accumulation, commodification, and profit-maximisation. Those who direct the University for the market are not simply Vice-Chancellors, but include policy makers, private equity fundholders, credit rating agencies, technology firms and publishers, and, indirectly, fee-paying students. This transnational activist network forms an association of capitals (Ball, 2012; Marx, 1993a) that subsumes and disciplines academic labour.

This subsumption of academic labour emerges under “the social tyranny of exchange-value” and the profit motive (Wendling, 2009, p. 52). What is currently being enacted through global labour arbitrage, outsourcing and precarity, is the alienation of academic labour through the enclosure and commodification of its products and relationships. This focus on production for exchange is then furthered through the cultural imperatives of student-as-consumer, league tables, impact-measures, knowledge exchange and so on. Against this tyranny might the value of academic labour, in the costs of its labour-power, the research/teaching products that it creates, and the relationships that it enables and maintains, be re-evaluated for its social use?

Such a re-evaluation demands that academics imagine that their skills, practices and knowledges might be shared and put to another use, in common and in co-operation. We might ask, is it possible to live and tell a different, overtly political story of academic labour? This focus on politics and organisation is a focus on recovering subjectivity as an academic and a labourer. As Cleaver (1993) notes in his final two theses on the Secular Crisis of Capitalism, this idea of recovering subjectivity through radical democracy is critical in liberating humanity from the coercive laws of competition and the market. For Cleaver, the creation of a revolutionary subjectivity is entwined with the need to develop: ‘[a] politics of alliance against capital... not only to accelerate the circulation of struggle from sector to sector of the class, but to do so in such a manner as to build a post-capitalist politics of difference without antagonism.’ Here the idea of academic as labourer is central, rather than academic as fetishized carrier of specific skills, practices and knowledges.

This paper will make three points. First, it will address the mechanisms through which the academic is increasingly alienated inside-and-against the University as it is recalibrated as an association of capitals. Second, it will ask whether and how academic labour might be renewed as part of a social struggle for subjectivity? The potential for co-operative alternatives based on solidarity, where they connect to a radical, societal, democratic project of refusal, will be highlighted. Third, the paper will ask whether it is possible to liberate academic labour for use-value that can be used inside and across society?

On the rollback of academic autonomy

Ball (2012) writes of three stages of neoliberalism. The first is *proto*, and refers to the intellectual genesis and maturation of the neoliberal project. This is the cultural attack on the everyday reality of the public and of the State, and lays the groundwork for building a consensus around the value of the market in defining the production of everyday life. It lays the groundwork for the market as the primary social arbiter. It also creates a set of spaces inside and against which the State can be reconfigured to deliver a policy structure that enhances marketisation. This is the doctrinaire new normal.

The second stage is *rollback*, during which social life that was hitherto experienced as public or social, like the post-war Keynesian consensus, and which included free-at-the-point-of-delivery healthcare or education or social services, is broken-up. As a result, those services are enclosed and marketised. In this stage there is a clear interplay between the doctrinal, intellectual underpinnings of neoliberalism and the undermining of the State or of public services as inefficient. This then connects to the third stage, that of the *rollout* of the new neoliberal normal, through actions like: defining public policy that enables the privatisation of public spaces; the insuring or indenture of access to public goods like pensions and healthcare; the individualised nature of social services; the opening-up of access to public data for private gain; the use of public policy to catalyse associations of corporations or capitals that can extract or accumulate value.

Inside English higher education these three interconnected phases of neoliberalism have played out in an increasingly indistinct manner. There has been a limited intellectual project about what higher education should be, or of the idea of what the University might be. In fact, we are left to seek out Coalition Government proposals from: analyses of ministerial pamphlets like Willetts' Robbins Revisited (2013); analyses of the Higher Education White Paper that never became an Act of Parliament (McGettigan, 2013); statements that anchor the University in economic growth (Snowden, 2013) through partnerships with, for example, finance capital (Willetts, 2014); or analyses of the role of private finance and global publishers like Pearson Education on private expansion inside higher education (Morgan, 2013). Thus, Willetts (2013) drives at the use of data in order to marketise educational life.

This is a very useful pointer for us as we review how we might extend the Key Information Set data in the future. Asking institutions to provide a breakdown of the average number of discussion classes for each course – broken down as Robbins suggests into tutorials, small seminars and large seminars – would allow students and parents to judge courses by the sort of teaching they value (p. 44)

Without radical changes to how universities were financed however it was going to be difficult to change their behaviour. Now there is an opportunity to use our funding changes to push a real cultural change back towards teaching (p. 47)

The quantification of academic practices, is also underpinned by secondary legislation that is focused upon: student debt and university funding; leveraging the role of finance capital and

the bond markets in institutional debt/refinancing; using student number controls, funding for core and marginal numbers, and deregulation to catalyse competition; and the monetisation of the student loan book (Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), 2014). Thus, in order to compete, individual universities are forced, for example: to restructure through bond markets; to rebrand themselves for international markets using engagement in on-line projects like FutureLearn; to assault labour rights through zero-hour contracts, casualization and outsourcing; to drive strategies for entrepreneurialism or social enterprise; to engage explicitly in corporate partnerships with publishers and finance capital that pivot around the production of value. Here the *proto* phase of the marketization of higher education meets the *rollback* of State funding and regulation, and the *rollout* of opportunities for marketization and accumulation, in a messy and contested set of spaces. This mess leaves those employed in the university contested and contesting, and dissonant and dissociated, and frayed.

A critical element in this process of fraying the perceived concrete reality of academic labour is the role of transnational activist networks that form geographies of neoliberalism in the recalibration of individual universities as global associations of capitals (Ball, 2012; Robinson, 2004). Such networks consist of academics and think-tanks, policy-makers and administrators, finance capital and venture capital and private equity, educational publishers, and philanthropists. Their aim is to regulate the State and the institutions that are structured by it, like universities, for the market, for enterprise, and for-profit. Critical here is that the *proto*, *rollback* and *rollout* phases are increasingly playing out together in real-time. As a result, the room for manoeuvre for individual institutions is restricted, so that they are forced to restructure for competitiveness in the face of increasingly scarce resources (like student debt, research funding and access to international markets).

Restructuring affects the everyday educational and pedagogical realities of academics and students by recalibrating: academic forms of production, exchange and consumption; academic relations to nature and the environment; the social relations between academics, managers and students; academic conceptions of the world; academic labour processes; university governance structures; and how the university contributes to social reproduction (*pace* Harvey, 2010). Thus, academics might ask the following questions.

1. How do the university's managers, staff and students produce, exchange and consume, in terms of commodities, knowledge and value? What is the role of financialisation and the market in those processes, and whom do they benefit?
2. What is the relationship of the University to nature and to the environment? What is the impact of the productive activities of the university on the environment, including its reinforcement of the idea that economic growth is the only option?
3. What does the production and the reproduction of the university as a marketised and competitive space mean for the social relations between people, including between staff, between academics and students, between managers and unions, and between academic labour and the public?
4. What does the production and the reproduction of the university mean for our mental conceptions of the world? What does the higher education mean in terms of commodified knowledge or economic growth, or for co-operative, social solutions, or

for the development and dissemination of knowledge through society as mass intellectuality?

5. How does the university as a competing business represent and reproduce casualised and precarious labour processes, amongst staff and students? What does the entrepreneurial turn inside the university mean for the autonomy of academic labour?
6. How does the marketised university affect our understandings of democratic, social governance? What forms of cognitive dissonance affect the role of the academic in making sense of the recalibration that is enforced through the *proto/rollback/rollout* phases of the neoliberal university?

In making sense of these questions, academics are reminded of Marx's (1845) response to Feuerbach that: 'All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.' Comprehension and solution underpins and is informed by a critical, pedagogic project that does not valorise specific entrepreneurial practices that make the individual academic/student resilient or employable or a commodity-skilled labourer inside the market. It is grounded in situated, democratic productive activity, which offers a mirror to the co-option of academic labour in the current *proto/rollback/rollout* phases of the neoliberal university. Moreover, it forms a critique of the transnational, secular control over the material reality of everyday life, and which is reinforced pedagogically (Cleaver, 1993; 2002).

On academic production inside associations of capitals

This idea of the subsumption of academic labour inside the circuits of capital is increasingly important in light of Marx's (1992; 1993a) focus on the associational phase of capital, in which capitalist development emerges on a global terrain, with an interrelationship between commercial and money-dealing capital and productive capital. Those who direct the University for the market are not simply Vice-Chancellors, but include associations of policy makers, private equity fundholders, credit rating agencies, technology firms and publishers, and, indirectly, fee-paying students, who form a deterritorialised network. Here, the expropriation of surplus value from producers by merchant capital is a primary source of profit, and in educational production it is leveraged through the use of finance capital and credit to increase the rate of turnover of specific educational commodities and services-as-commodities. This is achieved in a variety of ways, including: the on-line production and circulation of curriculum resources; the corporate funding of research centres; knowledge exchange and transfer; the outsourcing of physical and technological infrastructures; the idea of open education or MOOCs; the deployment of learning analytics; the management and sale of the student loan book.

Thus, in order to develop alternative, concrete realities it is worth re-thinking how merchant, credit and finance capital affect the inner workings of education, in particular as universities are being reconstructed inside the equivalent of joint-stock companies, subject to the coercive logic of competition for research grants and student numbers. What is the impact of the coercive role of money as it is insinuated inside educational practice? To what extent

does this process reinforce the reification of the student, the entrepreneurial academic, or specific technologies? How does the politicisation of these roles relate to the reproduction of capital? The market, defined by corporate entities operating as commercial capitalists, is divorced from the realities of educational production as a social activity, and is recalibrated around the individual production and consumption of educational services and products. Thus, students/academics are recalibrated not as social learners/teachers but as individual entrepreneurs able to access/produce educational services and products in a global market.

However, in this process of commercialising education a tension emerges from the increasingly limited spaces that are available for productive as opposed to rentier or interest-bearing capital. Marx (1992, pp. 444-5) argued that:

Within capitalist production merchant's capital is reduced from its former independent existence to a special phase in the investment of capital, and the levelling of profits reduces its rate of profit to the general average. It functions only as an agent of productive capital. The special social conditions that take shape with the development of merchant's capital, are here no longer paramount. On the contrary, wherever merchant's capital still predominates we find backward conditions.

The independent and predominant development of capital as merchant's capital is tantamount to the non-subjection of production to capital, and hence to capital developing on the basis of an alien social mode of production which is also independent of it. The independent development of merchant's capital, therefore, stands in inverse proportion to the general economic development of society.

Where commercial capital and money capital dissolve previous forms of production and destroy the communities on which they were based, then money capital and its characteristics define the community. So the public University is declared to be beyond hope and is under global pressure to reform (PA Consulting, 2014), or become revolutionised as an organisational form for the accumulation of capital, be that social, cultural or commercial/financial. Harvey (2013) refers to this as the 'solvent effect' that is also conjunctural with the development of a world market. The domination of commercial capital over production is witnessed in the University through: increasingly precarious working conditions for outsourced employees; an attrition on the labour rights of those producing the raw materials that go into the production/delivery of academic services, skills and knowledge; organisational development through lean or PRINCE 2/MSP methodologies; and the proliferation of zero-hour contracts, precarious employment and the generation and maintenance of a surplus population/labour.

However, as Marx writes (1992), this also re-focuses academics on the act of production, rather than on the circuits of money or commercial capital, as the truly revolutionary social activity. Thus, we witness the rise of campaigns like 3cosas (2014), University of Leeds Postgraduates for Fair Pay at the University of Leeds (PG4FP, 2014), and Australian anti-casualisation (CASA, 2014). These campaigns ask important questions about where power lies between finance, merchant and productive capital, and the individual producers and

consumers of educational products. Where educational corporations control most of the surplus value that is produced they can define production through labour arbitrage and a refusal to negotiate with academic labour. As employment is made precarious amongst individuated and separated educational producers, collectivisation is negated and ultra-exploitation or proletarianisation emerges. As a result, the domination of commercial or finance capital drives low prices in the sphere of production, and that restructures organisational forms through efficiency drives or technological innovation.

McGettigan (2014) writes of this restructuring of our educational lives by hedge funds, private equity, technology firms, credit rating agencies, publishers, think tanks and so on, which are circulating and accumulating capital produced inside the University, and doing so on a global terrain.

As universities mirror the increasingly unequal nature of English society, what they offer is a positional rather than a market good: their role in advancing social equality, or minimising embedded disadvantage, will be traduced in a meritocratic game of spotting 'talent' and ensuring that it is slotted into the appropriate tier. But the possibility of ditching even such minimal commitments to fair access hits a tipping point if the conversion from charity to for-profit is facilitated by government. This is so novel that we do not even have a term for such a process ('privatisation' does not cut it, since the charity is already private). We do though have a precedent. In 2012, College of Law was sold to Montagu Private Equity for £200 million. The export strategy document encourages universities to consider this option if they wish to exploit the new opportunities opened by the digital revolution that fixes education as a tradeable service.

It goes without saying that this process and that of the financialisation associated with a generalised loan scheme will feed off each other. Although the policy terrain is settled temporarily, the ball is very much in the court of individual institutions: there are few safeguards against the ambition of overweening vice-chancellors fuelled by new financial options.

Critically, the subsumption of universities inside the mechanics of capitalist reproduction demands a market. This applies to Vice-Chancellors acting as CEOs or nascent business leaders, and to private providers of educational services, both of whom need specific use-values (course content, data, knowledge exchange partnerships, research outcomes as products, technical infrastructure and so on) in specific amounts that can be purchased and put to work. Crucially, this work has to be productive of surplus value, and profit. Hence it needs a market, and if one doesn't already exist it must be created. This need for a market is also extended to potential students who carry debt, and who are encouraged to purchase commodities or services-as-commodities, as positional goods. Thus, the material circumstances of the production, purchase and circulation of educational commodities are critical, and they catalyse policy as a means of restructuring.

On concrete/abstract academic labour

One of the central issues for academics is that as they labour under commodity capitalists, they have to vie for a place on market, and this makes them vulnerable to crises related to futures-trading, or access to means of production, or to overproduction, or to market-saturation, or to an inability to access credit markets, or to more general, societal access to debt. Hence the very real impact of finance capital in creating a higher education market based on catalysing new systems of production or organisational development or technological innovation leaves universities at risk. It leaves academics at risk as the University's much-vaunted institutional autonomy abstracts it from a notion of public good and distances it from any socialised purpose or meaning. Autonomy prefigures marketisation and competitive restructuring. It is thus impossible to separate out Governmental policy based on competition, Governmental support for MOOCs like FutureLearn, or venture capital investment in educational technology start-ups, or University restructuring and reorganisation, from this drive to create a market.

One outcome is the need to commodify *both* pedagogy *and* academic relationships. *Pace* Marx (1993a), education as a commodity is critical because the commodity is the social form against which every educational capital can be considered. The circuit of educational commodities is the form of motion common to all educational capitals. It is social only in that it forms the total social capital of the capitalist class, as it is restructuring education. Moreover, the movement of individual educational capitals is conditioned by its relationship to other educational capitals, or universities. This is a material relation underscored by competition, surplus value extraction and accumulation, financialisation, and the rate of profit.

This process of commodification across higher education is also catalysed through value formation and the concomitant domination of labour by time. As Postone (1996, p. 191) writes:

As a category of the totality, socially necessary labor time expresses a quasi-objective social necessity with which the producers are confronted. It is the temporal dimension of the abstract domination that characterizes the structures of alienated social relations in capitalism. The social totality constituted by labor as an objective general mediation has a temporal character, wherein *time becomes necessity* (p. 191).

As a result, the University enmeshed in the market becomes a source of value and also seeks out value from new markets. The attrition on the average time it takes academic labour to produce, circulate or exchange commodities damages the sociability and solidarity of the academic's wider communities with whom s/he is now in competition. Thus, the socially necessary labour time of academic production increasingly dominates the life of the academic and the student. This domination is made worse for the academic as the University is subsumed under value accumulation, because the academic means of production are necessarily revolutionised through technological and organisational change. This leads to speed-up, impact measures, always-on technologies, performance or lean management, and so on, in order that the productivity of the academic can be measured against her peers through the socially-necessary labour time that determines what her

productivity *should* be. In a competitive market, if that four-week turnaround time is three weeks elsewhere, then academic labour rights will be threatened.

This argument of commonality and of the solidarity that emerges from global exploitation points towards the potential that labour has to be socially useful and thereby liberated as a common treasury. This is about liberation from the domination of abstract time and the recovery of a task-oriented life (Thompson, 1967). It is also about refusing, in Postone's (1996, p. 202) terms, a conception of time that is 'uniform, continuous, homogenous... [and] empty of events'. Here, useful labour emerges through tasks and events that reproduce society against-and-beyond value production. They are a form of sociability that do not occur within time, but instead structure and determine that time (Postone, 1996, p. 201).

What is missing in our current debates about the fee-cap, student-as-consumer/customer, the executive pay of vice-chancellors and institutional managers, student number control, the allocation of research income, and so on, is a meaningful discussion about the value of academic labour as social work/activity, rather than as reified exchange-value. What is its use-value as work/activity *for* society, as opposed to its price as a commodity/as academic labour-power? Increasingly academics are seeing their own labour abstracted for exchange and subsumed under the laws of competition, and as Wendling notes (2009, p. 52) this is disciplinary: 'the social tyranny of exchange-value is so comprehensive that it determines how things are made and even what is made... Capitalism does not care if it produces quantities for use; it cares about producing profit.' It is against this tyranny that the value of academic labour, in the costs of its labour-power, the research/teaching products that it creates, and the relationships that it enables and maintains, might usefully be discussed and re-evaluated. What is currently being enacted through global labour arbitrage, outsourcing and precarious employment, is the alienation of academic labour through the enclosure and commodification of its products and relationships. This focus on production for exchange is then furthered through the cultural imperatives of student-as-consumer, league tables, impact-measures, knowledge exchange and so on.

Thus, analysing the interplay between the abstract world and its concrete realisation is fundamental. Here there is a flow between the concrete and the abstract so that each emerges from and reinforces the other. Thus:

What is required, then, is an approach which allows for a distinction between what modern capitalism is and the way it appears, between its essence and appearance. The concept "modern" does not allow for such a distinction. These considerations lead us to Marx's concept of the fetish, the strategic intent of which was to provide a social and historical theory of knowledge grounded in the difference between the essence of capitalist social relations and their manifest form. (Postone, 1980, p. 108)

Critical here is finding a means of decoding how relations of educational production and the educational commodities that are produced socially, are externalised and take the form of fetishes. Moreover, they are at once both abstract and concrete, with each informing the production and reproduction of the other. This appears on the surface of society to be a set of relationships that are mediated and abstracted by money (the cost of a degree reduced

to a fee that acts as a representation of value) and by the law (in terms of requirements for published data, or access to/control of a market, and so on). For many academics, abstract labour rooted in exchange-value feels less meaningful or truthful than the concrete form of academic labour rooted in self-critical scholarly work. However, inside a global education market and against the structuring realities of money, it becomes difficult to move beyond the alienation of both concrete and abstract academic labour because neither can be properly decoded.

One aspect of the fetish, then, is that capitalist social relations do not appear as such and, moreover, present themselves antinomically, as the opposition of the abstract and concrete. Because, additionally, both sides of the antinomy are objectified, each appears to be quasi-natural: the abstract dimension appears in the form of "objective," "natural" laws; the concrete dimension appears as pure "thingly" nature. The structure of alienated social relations which characterize capitalism has the form of a quasi-natural antinomy in which the social and historical do not appear. (Postone, 1980, p. 109)

This is the dialectical relation between the abstract and the concrete, which is both historical and material, and which is subsuming academic life as labour inside a terrain of value-production and accumulation. Without an analysis of the ways that *both* concrete *and* abstract academic labour are manifest in capitalist social relations and generative of value, there is no way that crises can be overcome. The result is a form of dissonance or dissociation.

The pattern I have outlined suggests that, in the society in which the commodity is totalized, there is an underlying tension between ecological considerations and the imperatives of value as the form of wealth and social mediation. It implies further that any attempt to respond fundamentally, within the framework of capitalist society, to growing environmental destruction by restraining this society's mode of expansion would probably be ineffective on a long-term basis — not only because of the interests of the capitalists or state managers, but because failure to expand surplus value would indeed result in severe economic difficulties with great social costs. In Marx's analysis, the necessary accumulation of capital and the creation of capitalist society's wealth are intrinsically related. Moreover [...] because labor is determined as a necessary means of individual reproduction in capitalist society, wage laborers remain dependent on capital's "growth," even when the consequences of their labor, ecological and otherwise, are detrimental to themselves and to others. The tension between the exigencies of the commodity form and ecological requirements becomes more severe as productivity increases and, particularly during economic crises and periods of high unemployment, poses a severe dilemma. This dilemma and the tension in which it is rooted are immanent to capitalism: their ultimate resolution will be hindered so long as value remains the determining form of social wealth. (Postone, 1996, p. 313)

Interestingly, Postone (1980) makes a critical point about the relationship between the concrete, productive manifestation of capital, through its relationships to industry and technology, as a form of natural work or labour, and crisis. Thus, the idea

that the concrete is "natural," and which increasingly presents the socially "natural" in such a way that it is perceived in biological terms. It is precisely the hypostatization of the concrete and the identification of capital with the manifest abstract which renders this ideology so functional for the development of industrial capitalism in crisis... The identification of capital with the manifest abstract overlaps, in part, with its identification with the market. The attack on the liberal state, as abstract, can further the development of the interventionist state, as concrete. This form of "anti-capitalism," then, only appears to be looking backwards with yearning. As an expression of the capital fetish its real thrust is forwards. It is an aid to capitalism in the transition to quasi-state capitalism in a situation of structural crisis (Postone, 1980, p. 111).

In moments of crisis, not only is it a mistake to seek redress in technocratic domination or in terms of abstract reason, but it is also alienating to look for natural solutions in the form of concrete labour or the use-value of work, because both routes are historically and materially 'impotent in the face of capital', and offer no direction towards post-capitalism (Postone, 1980, p. 115)

On value and academic alienation

What is required is a means of critiquing the alienation imposed by and emerging from capitalist work in its interrelated abstract and concrete forms, and through its fetishisation of technological solutions to crises, be they political, financial, societal or environmental in appearance. The attempt to overcome crises borne of competition by renewing personal or social or transnational values that are themselves fashioned inside that competitive dynamic is impossible. A social revolution of life cannot be delivered through a revolution of social (re-)production that is rooted in value production and labour, or through the recuperation of concrete labour or use-value as an alleged antidote to the abstract capitalist world. As the natural world is subsumed and reproduced inside it, the ecology of capitalism reveals both the concrete and the abstract as alienating.

This is important because academic labour is increasingly being revealed as subsumed inside the material (structural and systemic) and historical inability of capital to overcome the limitations on stable, global forms of accumulation. Jappe (2014) argues that that the capitalist mode of production is reaching its historical limits, in part through technological innovation that drives up the organic composition of capital and undermines the basis of value production and the rate of profit. One of the critical issues is that globally "the absolute amount of value, and therefore of surplus-value, is declining precipitously" (Jappe, 2014, p. 7), which places a society based on the production and accumulation of value in crisis, not least because it leads to labour-related counter-measures linked to unemployment, precarity, organisational restructuring, outsourcing and so on, alongside a series of financialised counter-measures, like quantitative easing, bank bailouts and wealth transfers from young people via debt to pay for an expected future standard of living. This decline in value is also witnessed in the growing amount of externalised national debt, which is based to a large extent on unrealisable assets like sub-prime educational loans. This also mediates the relationship between national debt and geopolitical manoeuvring, like the

recent on-going push by the UK Government for higher education to underpin exports and act as a counter-measure against a balance of payments deficit (Willetts, 2014).

What might be needed, in order for academics and students to push back, is a re-focusing on the counter-hegemonic potential of academic labour-power, knowledge, skills and practices for socially-useful work or activity, which is outside of Capital's system of value. As Marx notes (2004, pp. 300-1)

The value of labour-power and the value which that labour-power valorises... in the labour-process are two entirely different magnitudes; and this difference was what the capitalist had in-mind when he was purchasing labour-power... What was really decisive for him was the specific use-value which this commodity possesses of being a source not only of value, but of more value than it has itself. This is the specific service the capitalist expects from labour-power, and in this transaction he acts in accordance with the eternal laws of commodity-exchange. In fact, the seller of labour-power, like the seller of any other commodity, realises... its exchange-value, and alienates... its use-value.

This set of contradictions and tensions, between use and exchange inside the production and movement of value, and the role of labour as commodity needs to be addressed in the context of the University. How is the work that academics do to be valued? How does it add value and for whom, and how might its social potential be liberated? This means that academics need to understand the concrete and abstract mediation of their work (Postone, 1980), in order to address the mechanisms through which that work is leveraged.

Here one returns to the mechanisms through which academic labour is co-opted and then *both* abstracted from the circuit of production (in bond markets or student debt) *and* made concrete in the realities of everyday life (in marking or giving feedback, or in writing). One also returns to the role of academic labour in the reproduction of a society that is based on value production and accumulation:

A growing disparity arises between developments in the productive powers of labor (which are not necessarily bound to the direct labor of the workers), on the one hand, and the value frame within which such developments are expressed (which *is* bound to such labor), on the other. The disparity between the accumulation of historical time and the objectification of immediate labor time becomes more pronounced as scientific knowledge is increasingly materialized in production... a growing disparity separates the conditions for the production of material wealth from those for the generation of value. (Postone, 1996, p. 297)

What this demands is that academic labour is analysed in terms of the crisis of value formation on a global terrain (Jappe, 2014). This is not to reify academic labour in its concrete forms or uses, or to willingly to accept its subsumption inside the circuits of exchange. However, the recalibration of the skills, practices and knowledge of academics and students, whose labour is at once concrete and abstract, useful and used for exchange, is occurring at a time when the secular crisis of capitalism means that stable forms of accumulation cannot be reinstated (Cleaver, 1993). This secular crisis is transnational, and is

economic, social and political, with environmental symptoms that are material and historical. It may be that the transnational, associational form of capitalist development points towards an alternative possibility, in which academic labour might be dissolved inside-and-though society.

Possibility through mass intellectuality?

The links between commercial educational providers and universities, educators and students as producers and consumers of educational services, data and products, demonstrate hegemony and dependency. This complex interdependency is not reducible to fetishized ideas of money via cost-savings or emancipation based on learning for a life of capitalist work. It links to ideas of the reproduction of capital within limits or barriers, and the current condition inside-and-against education demonstrates how crises re-establish the limits and conditions existing in the system as a totality and in the circuits of productive, money and commodity capital. Across a global educational terrain, the attempt by finance and commercial capital to synchronise production within their own circuits forms an uncomfortable symbiosis, as those engaged in a higher education that is being restructured by the dictates of finance capital and a new market can attest.

The reaction of capital to the crisis of value production is important because it connects to Marx's (1993a) hints about how the associational phase of capital might itself open-up opportunities for alternative, co-operative forms of socially-useful work or practice to emerge. These opportunities are global in scope, and are based on co-operative and democratic engagements in civil and political society that include the market, the State, the Commons, and voluntary organisations. This reflects the work of Bauwens and Iacomella (2012) on creating a co-operative, pedagogical project that might reveal alternatives: to the idea of endless growth and material abundance linked to debt; to the idea of immaterial scarcity framed by, for example, the Trans-Pacific Partnership/the Transatlantic Trade and Investments Partnership and global intellectual property law; and the pseudo-abundance that encloses and destroys the biosphere. Bauwens and Iacomella (2012) argue for a global alliance, between movements based on open and copyfarleft, ecology and social justice, and global emancipation. Here academics might usefully ask, what activities are we collectively willing to bear and how might they be determined, governed and regulated?

The work emerging around the new co-operativism, and the intellectual underpinnings of pedagogies like student-as-producer (Neary, 2012) and of organisations like the Social Science Centre (2014), offer us a way of framing and reconceptualising the potential proto/rollback/rollout phases of a co-operative alternative to neoliberalism. This work is also a way of challenging the reality of the competitive restructuring of public higher education, and the idea that the university is for-profit and valorisation. Here it is the spread of ideas across transnational activist networks of co-operators that might enable a reconnection of academic labour as labour across society, in a form that enables it to support mass intellectuality rather than private accumulation (University of Utopia, 2014; Virno, 2001). As the Social Science Centre (2014) states, hope lies in the 'possibilities for associational networks' that critique higher education policy and practice.

For Amsler (2013) the starting point is less the production of value and more the solidarity of shared, humane values. In writing of the fearless university, she argued the following.

When we look a little wider, we begin to see that many ways of organising academic labour, non-academic university labour, teaching, learning, research, student life and campus culture are standardising and globalising. Institutional discourses on scholarship, teaching, learning, research and education itself have been so honed and intellectually impoverished over decades, increasingly by people who have no primary interest in any of these things, that it can be difficult to imagine them as anything other than technical activities.

if we are to shape universities to be places in which we can actually teach and study and learn and be... we need to educate ourselves about the politics of higher education, advanced research, labour, intellectual culture, space and time. And we need to do this in a context in which thinking and speaking about the politics of any of these things is regarded as either a waste of time or a threat to economic productivity and institutional 'reputation'... And we need to do this in an environment where perhaps many academics, by dint of profession or proclivity, have either no experience of political participation or activism, or no interest in social and economic politics at all. And we need to do all of this in an environment where many academics and some students are exhausted and insecure and are therefore in need of considerable self and collective care. It is at least a fourfold project. This should not be daunting; life is complex.

The call for 'a little more of a politicised relation to truth in affairs of education, knowledge and academic practice' is a form of bell hooks' (1994) self-actualisation: a capacity to live more fully and deeply. This is a humane capacity that is also the capability to liberate time for solidarity actions and activities, rather than for exchange. Here, academic life is not driven by a commodity-valuation based on the domination of abstract time. Academic life is governed by time that is useful for social reproduction. It is not about impact metrics or performance management or turnaround times or workload management. It is based on personal and social relations that dissolve the barriers between work and life, and which enable the teacher and the student to form a pedagogical alliance for the collective, socially-negotiated overcoming of capital's power-over learning, teaching and the curriculum. This alliance, revealed inside-and-against abstract time, is the beginning and end of a pedagogical fight for free time; a concrete struggle against abstract processes for value creation and accumulation; the potential to be and to become.

Can academics and students as scholars learn to see their labour in common, in order to think and to act co-operatively, and to overcome that labour? Addressing this question moves beyond concerns over the production and ownership of academic labour, to explore the concept of living knowledge, or the liberation of the general intellect as a form of 'mass intellectuality'. Marx (1993b, p. 694) argued that the dynamics of capitalism meant

the accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital, and more specifically of fixed capital [machinery].

As the University of Utopia (2014) argued, this might form a point of departure where:

As intellectual workers we refuse the fetishised concept of the knowledge society and engage in teaching, learning and research only in so far as we can re-appropriate the knowledge that has been stolen from the workers that have produced this way of knowing (i.e. Abundance). In the society of abundance the university as an institutional form is dissolved, and becomes a social form or knowledge at the level of society (i.e. The General Intellect). It is only on this basis that we can knowingly address the global emergencies with which we are all confronted.

What is needed is a focus on the possibilities that emerge from co-operative work and activities, rooted in a flowering of alternative educational practices that develop socialised knowledge, or 'mass intellectuality', as a direct, social force of production. As the University of Utopia (2014) argued:

Mass intellectuality is based on our common ability to do, based on our needs and capacities and what needs to be done. What needs to be done raises doing from the level of the individual to the level of society.

This matters because as McGettigan (2014) notes there is an increasingly generalised democratic deficit inside institutions, in terms of the idea of the public, and the ways in which universities are financed, regulated and governed. This is a profound, qualitative shift that demands an engagement rooted in governance. For Winn (2014), there are three possible responses tied to academic production and governance.

1. *Conversion*: Constitute the university on co-operative values and principles.
2. *Dissolution*: Radicalise the university from the inside, starting with the relationship between academics and students.
3. *Creation*: Build experiments in higher education outside the financialised sector.

In each of these responses, whether academics can develop alternative methods of liberating knowing and knowledge and organisation that are beyond the space-time of debt and privatisation becomes critical. Winn's three responses are conditioned by the structural domination of wage labour, and the reality that the co-operative space has to exist inside the totalising relations of production of capitalist society. However, they offer alternative possibilities for liberating science and technology across society, and to enable what Arvidsson (2008) calls the 'free availability of General Intellect in the social environment [which] means that capital cannot exercise a monopoly over this productive resource. It can be employed for autonomous or even subversive purposes.' The three responses might act as critical sites in this struggle for 'mass intellectuality' through: the reclamation of public, open environments that enable the globalised, socialised dissemination of knowledge, for example through copyfarleft (Kleiner, 2014); the connection of a global set of educational commons rooted in critical pedagogy; and the use of governance structures to ground, critique and disseminate the community-building of alternative educational settings like student occupations, co-operative centres or social science centres.

These struggles for mass intellectuality form an attempt to build solidarity and sharing related to the social and co-operative use of the knowledge, skills and practices that academics create as forms of labour. This is deliberately opposed to their commodification, exchange and accumulation by transnational elites. Thus, liberating science and technology from *inside-and-against* capital's competitive dynamics is central to moving *beyond* exploitation through the abolition of wage-labour. Inside critical and co-operative (rather than co-opted) educational contexts, the processes of learning and teaching offer the chance to critique the purposes for which the general intellect is commodified rather than made public.

The interrelationship between the Commons, the State and its institutions, and civil society are critical in trying to define a post-capitalism as a pedagogical, societal moment that is historically-rooted and material in nature. Here Cumbers' (2012) argument that 'there needs to be a more nuanced appreciation of the dynamic nature of spatial organization and governance under advanced capitalism...' (p. 156), aligns with the work of the Free, Libre, Open Knowledge (FLOK) Society in its Open Letter to the Commoners (2014a):

Imagine a society that is connected to open knowledge commons in every domain of human activity, based on free and open knowledge, code, and design that can be used by all citizens along with government and market players without the discrimination and disempowerment that follows from privatized knowledge.

It also aligns with the FLOK Society's General Framework Document (2014b), which aims

to trigger and coordinate a global participatory process and immediate national application for the change of productive matrix towards a society of open and common knowledge in Ecuador, resulting in 10 base documents for legislation and state policies (synchronized with the organic social code for the knowledge economy) as well as useful for the production networks of knowledge that already exist in Ecuador. The conceptual, philosophical and economic process and the historical and socio-cognitive context framework, the organizational principles governing the process, collaborative and communicative digital tools and advance planning of the whole process.

The issue is whether it is possible to reclaim the public space, in the face of the crisis of value? Is it possible to reconsider pedagogically the relation between the concrete and the abstract as they are reproduced inside capitalism? Is it possible to liberate democratic capability and to reorient social production away from value and towards the very possibility of governing and managing the production of everyday life in a participatory manner?

This means the negation of the reified nature of academic labour, so that social values rather than value are at the core of how society is reproduced. Here Amsler's focus on fearlessness connects to Cleaver's (1993) call for

[a] politics of alliance against capital... not only to accelerate the circulation of struggle from sector to sector of the class, but to do so in such a manner as to build a post-capitalist politics of difference without antagonism.

A re-politicisation of academic labour may begin the process of overcoming its abstracted and fetishised nature. The starting point is the definition of a pedagogical moment that enables the characteristics that flow into and out of academic labour, in terms of value, money and the commodity, to be defined in another image of society and social production. Such a pedagogical moment needs to point towards the creation of open, participatory publics, in order to underpin the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.

References

Amsler, S. 2013. *The Fearless University*. Available online:

<http://amsler.blogs.lincoln.ac.uk/2013/05/16/the-fearless-university/>

Arvidsson, A. 2008. Valuing the Ethical Economy. *P2P Foundation*. Available online:

http://p2pfoundation.net/Valuing_the_Ethical_Economy

Ball, S.J. 2012. *Global Education Inc. New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary*. London: Routledge.

Bauwens, M., and Iacomella, F. 2012. Peer-to-Peer Economy and New Civilization Centered Around the Sustenance of the Commons. In *The Wealth of the Commons: A World Beyond Market and State*. The Commons Strategy Group. Available online:

<http://wealthofthecommons.org/essay/peer-peer-economy-and-new-civilization-centered-around-sustenance-commons>

bell hooks. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. London: Routledge.

CASA. 2014. A home online for casual, adjunct, sessional staff and their allies in Australian higher education. Available online: <http://actualcasuals.wordpress.com/>

Cleaver, H. 1993. *Theses on Secular Crisis in Capitalism*. Available online:

<http://libcom.org/library/theses-secular-crisis-capitalism-cleaver>

Cleaver, H. 2002. *Reading capital politically*. Edinburgh: AK Press.

Cumbers, A. 2012. *Reclaiming Public Ownership: Making Space for Economic Democracy*. London: Zed Books.

FLOK Society. 2014a. Open Letter to the Commoners. Available online:

http://en.wiki.floksociety.org/w/Open_Letter_to_the_Commoners

FLOK Society. 2014b. General Framework Document. Available online:

http://en.wiki.floksociety.org/w/General_Framework_Document

Harvey, D. 2010. *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism*. London: Profile Books.

Harvey, D. 2013. *A Companion to Marx's Capital: Volume 2*. London: Verso.

IFS. 2014. Estimating the public cost of student loans. London: IFS. Available online:

<http://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/r94.pdf>

Jappe, A. (2014). Towards a History of the Critique of Value. *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 25(2), 25-37. Available online: DOI: 10.1080/10455752.2014.906820

Kleiner, D. 2014. The Telekommunist Manifesto. *Network Notebooks 03*. Available at: http://www.networkcultures.org/uploads/%233notebook_telekommunist.pdf

Marx, K. 1845. Theses on Feuerbach. *Marx/Engels Internet Archive*. Available online. <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>

Marx, K. 2004. *Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*. London: Penguin.

Marx, K. 1993. *Capital, Volume 2: A Critique of Political Economy*. London: Penguin.

Marx, K. 1992. *Capital, Volume 3: A Critique of Political Economy*. London: Penguin.

McGettigan, A. 2013. *The Great University Gamble: Money, Markets and the Future of Higher Education*. London: Pluto Press.

McGettigan, A. 2014. Financialising the University. *Arena Magazine*. Available online: <http://arena.org.au/financialising-the-university/>

Morgan, J. 2013. Pearson profits from private expansion. *Times Higher Education* (28 November 2013). Available online: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/pearson-profits-from-private-expansion/2009372.article>

Neary, M. 2012. Teaching Politically: Policy, Pedagogy and the New European University. *The Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 10, no. 2: 233-57.

PA Consulting. 2014. Education. Available online: <http://www.paconsulting.com/industries/government-and-public-services/education/>

PG4FP. 2014. Available online: <http://leedspostgrad4fairpay.wordpress.com/>

Postone, M. 1980. Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to "Holocaust". *New German Critique*. Special Issue 1: Germans and Jews (Winter 1980): 97-115.

Postone, M. 1996. *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Robinson, W.I. 2004. *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World*. Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University Press.

Snowdon, C. 2013. President's address to 2013 Members' Annual Conference: The enduring value of universities. Universities UK. Available online: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Pages/PresidentsAddress2013AnnualConference.aspx#.U57qiSJnSSp>

Social Science Centre. 2014. Available online: <http://socialsciencecentre.org.uk/>

Thompson, E.P. 1967. *Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism*. *Past and Present*, 38 (1): 56-97. Available online: doi:10.1093/past/38.1.56

The University of Utopia. 2014. *Anti-Curricula: A Course of Action*. Available online: <http://www.universityofutopia.org/sharing>

Virno, P. 2001. *General Intellect*. Available online: <http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpvirno10.htm>.

Wendling, A. E. 2009. *Karl Marx on Technology and Alienation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Willetts, D. 2013. *Robbins Revisited: Bigger and Better Higher Education*. London: Social Market Foundation. Available online: <http://www.smf.co.uk/research/category-two/robbins-revisited/>

Willetts, D. 2014. Contribution of UK universities to national and local economic growth. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/contribution-of-uk-universities-to-national-and-local-economic-growth>

Winn, J. 2014. Is the worker co-operative form suitable for a university? (Part 3). Available online: <http://josswinn.org/2014/04/is-the-worker-co-operative-form-suitable-for-a-university-part-3/>

3 cosas campaign. 2014. Available online: <http://3cosascampaign.wordpress.com/>